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DEPARTMENT FOR H, EUR/NCE AND EUR/PGI; PLEASE PASS TO  
CONGRESSMAN SIRES AND CONGRESSMEN DIAZ-BALLERT

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SCENE-SETTER FOR THE VISIT OF CODEL SIRES TO  
HUNGARY

REF: STATE 117970

¶1. Embassy Budapest warmly welcomes the visit of Codel Sires to Hungary.

¶2. You will arrive as the body politic prepares for Parliament's return to formal session in mid-September. Most observers predict a busy ) and possibly hot ) fall, with continued friction between the Gyurcsany government and the opposition.

¶3. Despite conflict over issues ranging from economic reform to energy security, Cuba policy enjoys broad consensus across Hungary's fractious political spectrum. GoH officials will tell you proudly ) albeit privately ) that Hungary has "left the EU mainstream" to take a more active stand in promoting a democratic transition by working both within the Union and with the Cuban opposition. Their new Ambassador in Havana, a journalist and former exchange student in Cuba who exemplifies the strong personal ties between Hungary and Cuba, has brought a new activism to their efforts. The MFA is increasing its staff on the island in order to expand their outreach, and believes that sharing experiences of their own peaceful political and economic transition is the most effective approach to promote a transition "from within."

¶4. They believe, however, that their physical presence is key to their ability to affect change, and have avoided actions or statements which they believe would jeopardize their diplomatic mission there or provoke open conflict with other EU member states. Cuba remains far from Hungary's traditional sphere of influence (or interest). Although the political parties have shown increasing interest in the issue, the government will likely proceed deliberately, along lines that complement our policy.

¶5. The GoH's recent decision to accept the resettlement of 30 protected migrants from Guantanamo is a case in point. After extensive deliberation and close consultation with us, the government is moving forward in response to our request and with our financial support, with arrival expected in September. Although the decision enjoys support from all parliamentary parties, the government has maintained a low profile on the issue and we have agreed to follow their lead.

When the decision was criticized in the Cuban state media, the GoH framed its decision as a humanitarian initiative within the parameters of EU policy. They will welcome your expression of appreciation, but prefer that we maintain a restrained posture in any public statements.

¶6. Your schedule will begin with a meeting with Prime Minister and MSZP Party President Ferenc Gyurcsany following lunch at the Ambassador's residence. With his reform agenda largely stalled, Gyurcsany is under attack by the opposition

and under scrutiny even within his own coalition government. Although his focus remains primarily on domestic issues, he will appreciate your recognition of Hungary's efforts on Cuba, particularly its decision to accept the protected migrants, as well as their leadership of a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan. He will likely reiterate his commitment to "Western values," and may well use your visit to underscore Hungary's interest in the Visa Waiver Program, our leading bilateral issue.

¶7. Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) President Ibolya David is a former Minister of Justice and the most personally popular political figure in Hungary. Her party has staked out an independent position, focusing its message on promoting fiscal responsibility and opposing populist rhetoric and criticizing both the government and the principal opposition party. Support for transparency and the middle class are key themes for the MDF, and Dr. David is also working to raise her international profile. She has spoken out on Cuba and met publicly with opposition figures on the margins of a recent conference in Budapest.

¶8. GoH officials, Members of Parliament, and opinion leaders have been invited to a reception in your honor on the evening of August 29. We hope that MP Matyas Eorsi, who recently traveled to Cuba on a Freedom House program, will attend and share his experiences from his visit.

¶9. Foreign Minister Kinga Goncz has taken a very personal interest in Cuba, and will emphasize Hungary's "moral responsibility" to share its experiences from its own transition. Her ministry has been the driving force behind the refugee resettlement, which represents a bold step for the GoH.

¶10. The SzDSz party traces its roots back to the anti-communist dissident movement of the 1970s and many of their members feel a strong connection to the Cuban opposition. As the junior coalition party, they are working to distinguish themselves from the MSZP on key issues and their leader, Minister of Economy Janos Koka, has been outspoken in support of a democratic transition in Cuba (including in an op-ed in the Miami press earlier this year). Istvan Szent-Ivanyi, a Member of the European Parliament, is one of the SzDSz's leading voices on foreign affairs and a committed Atlanticist. He can discuss Cuba in the broader context of European views during your meeting.

¶11. International Center for Democratic Transition (ICDT) Director Istvan Gyarmati is a former diplomat and remains a key informal advisor to the MSZP leadership. The ICDT is active around the globe, and Gyarmati can detail their project proposals for Cuba over lunch.

¶12. Your official schedule will conclude with a meeting with opposition FIDESZ Party President (and former Prime Minister) Viktor Orban. Rising to prominence as an anti-Soviet student activist, Orban has moved his party to the right over the course of the past decade. His party continues to oppose the Gyurcsany government on all fronts. Orban has expressed support for a strong trans-Atlantic agenda, and FIDESZ has seized on the Cuba issue in particular, with Orban and other party leaders "adopting" political prisoners to help publicize their cases internationally. He may use your meeting to raise his interest in high-level meetings in the US later this year, potentially in his capacity as Vice-President of the European Peoples Party (EPP).

¶13. We look forward to welcoming you in person.